

An exhibition of the woodcuts and wood-engravings of
Leonard Baskin: a part of the Graven Image exhibition
of 1962, held at the RWS Galleries, 26 Conduit Street W1
from May 1 to May 26, 1962







Blake from a life mask by Deville wood-engraving / 1956

Leonard Baskin is rightly received as one of the most skilled engravers in the history of art. The almost superhuman delicacy and subtlety of the engraving in the miniature Blake studies, or the dead starling, or the portrait of Walt Whitman, has scarcely its equal anywhere. The massive daemonic energy and trenchancy of *The Hanged Man* and the *Strabismic Jew* are to be found in Baskin's work alone

Technique is not a machine to do work, like a car engine that runs best of all with little or no load, but the act of work being done. So-called 'technique without substance' is our polite word for fakery, or the appearance of something happening that is not happening, and attracts our attention at all only because we will look for some minutes at absolutely anything that seems to say 'look at me', so humble and great is our hope. In Baskin's work one can no longer easily talk about 'technique' after the engraving called *'The Hanged Man'*. This figure was the earliest emergence of the second of the two phases, represented here, through which his art has so far passed, and the point at which an outstanding talent, of unmanageable density and potential, suffered the inner explosion that transformed it into genius and one of the deepest and most intense imaginations of our time

From that point the 'technique' seems no longer an aptitude of the artist, but a possession of the vision, the physical, prehensile grasp of an unusual spirit. This spirit is of such intensity that wherever it appears it permits nothing but itself to remain. It is not interested in the furniture or incidental lighting of existence, or any view from the window. It has identified itself with the naked form of the *Angel of Life*. So these engravings, in their endless variety, are the self-portraits of the *Angel of*

Life in its wholeness: men, beasts, birds, insects, plants and supernatural beings, each in the terrible immobility of being forced and fated to move at once in two opposite directions, for the Angel of Life is also, in spite of itself, to its own horror, the Angel of Death

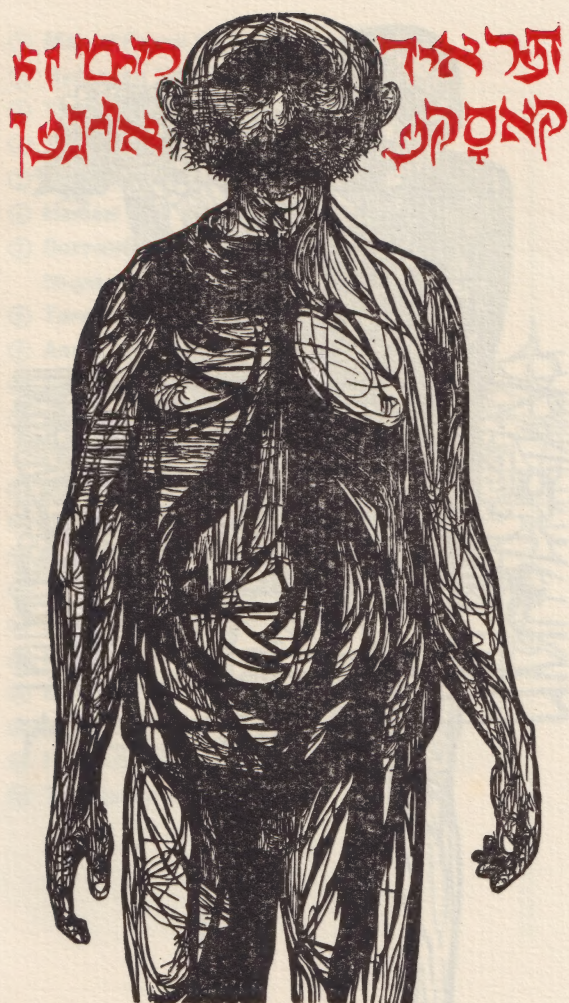
How could such images be other than single, like suns, the dead epidermis burned away, without panorama? If they are multiple, they revolve around each other, like suns, in a single image, over nothingness, like God, or a last breath, or a birth-cry, a dead body, a small face singled for confrontation by the nothingness and the calamity of existence. How deep is agony and how deep is joy and what can survive the answer. The thing that survives guides the blade that cuts these images from the mass of the world's ashes

'The Hanged Man' is not dead: it is the Angel, shattered by death, dispersed to the Universe, re-assembled by joy, that here takes up a position in which it is equal to the whole of its past and the whole of its future. So the dead crow, just the size of crow, as he is just the size of a man, is The Hanged Man's equal. Every feather of the crow is there and perfect, and the crow is dead, yet this bird again is the immortal Angel of Life. In the aspect of the Angel of Death. And the dog of joy, which we are to love, opens its mouth to exult and, appalled, hears the roar of the beast of death. These are emissaries from the sole source. The small, grubby, haughty, reasonable devils of lies and compromise, the frivolous and complacent devils, the optimistic joyless devils, the whole black gibbering cloud of our unreality, leave us in terror or faint with humiliation when we look rightly into these engravings

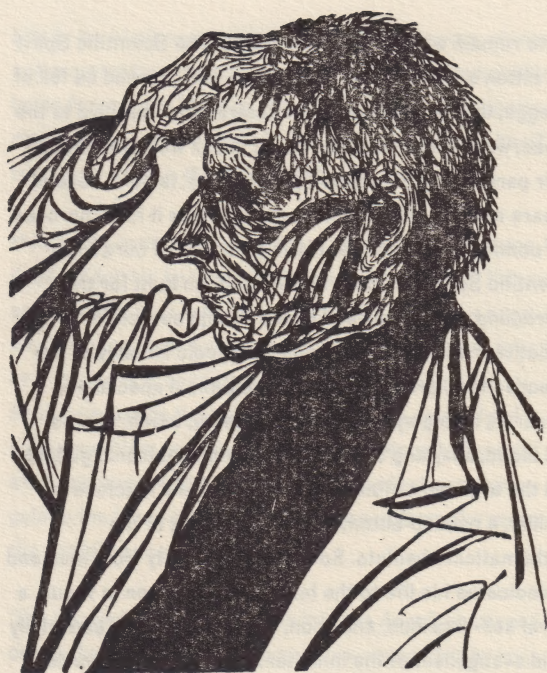
In our time, the heroic struggle is not to become a hero,



Samuel Palmer after the watercolour by Walter
wood-engraving / 1956



but to remain a living creature simply. The Scientific Spirit has bitten so many of us in the nape, and pumped us full of its eggs, the ferocious virus of abstraction. We yield to the larvae, warmly numbed, and we all speak well of them and their parent. The Scientific Spirit, we say, is hard-headed, it fears nothing, it faces the facts, and how it has improved our comforts! And yet what is this master of ours? The Scientific Spirit was born of the common hunt for the nourishing morsel, nursed by the benign search for objective truth, schooled in the pedagogic idolatry of the objective fact, graduated through old-maid specialised research, losing eyes, ears, smell, taste, touch, nerves and blood, adapting to the sensibility of electronic gadgets and the argument of numbers, to become a machine of senility, a pseudo-automaton in the House of the Mathematical Absolute. So it ousts humanity from man and he dedicates his life to the laws of the electron in vacuo, a literal self-sacrifice, and soon, by bigotry and the especially rabid evangelism of the inhuman, a literal world-sacrifice, as we all too truly now fear. Any artist who resists the suction into this galactic firestorm and holds to bodily wholeness and the condition of the creature, finds ranged against him the worldly powers of our age and everything that is not the suffering vitality of nature. The victims of radio-activity and of the death-camps, the corpse of a bird, an agony too private to name, become the only unequivocal portraits of life, of the Angel a hundred faces behind the human face. In this way, the particular misery and disaster of our time are, uniquely, the perfect conditions for the purest and most intense manifestation of the spirit, the Angel, the ghost of ashes, the survivor of the Creation, which has chosen to reveal itself in the works of Leonard Baskin

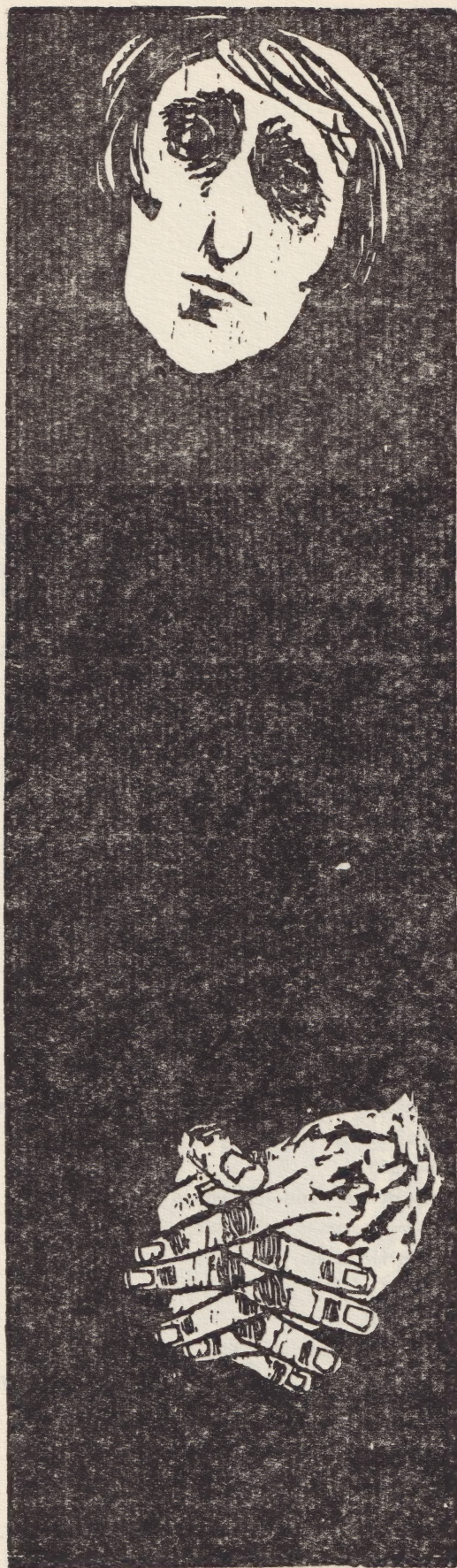


Portrait of an Irishman (Sean O'Casey) woodcut/1952



Man of Peace woodcut/1952

- ① **Man of Peace** 1952 50 gns
- ② **Hydrogen Man** 1954 50 gns
- ③ **The Hanged Man** 1955 50 gns
- ④ **The Strabismic Jew** 1955 50 gns
- ⑤ **The Poet Laureate** 1955 50 gns
- ⑥ **Haman** 1955 50 gns
- ⑦ **Sorrowing and Terrified Man** 1956
50 gns
- ⑧ **Torment** 1958 42 gns
- ⑨ **Angel of Death** 1959 50 gns
- ⑩ **Everyman** 1960 60 gns
- ⑪ **Portrait of an Irishman**
(Sean O'Casey) 1952 16 gns
- ⑫ **Prawn** 1951 15 gns
- ⑬ **Homage to Gene Debs** 1949 20 gns
- ⑭ **Man and Dog** 1954 15 gns
- ⑮ **Thou Shalt not Eat Meat** 1952 15 gns
- ⑯ **Son and Father** 1950 15 gns
- ⑰ **Mourning Woman** 1950 13 gns
- ⑱ **Self portrait at 29** 1952 13 gns
- ⑲ **Self portrait as a Priest** 1952 15 gns
- ⑳ **Fiorentino** 1952 12 gns
- ㉑ **Tormented Man** 15 gns



- ②② **A page of five wood-engravings** from 'Castle Street Dogs' Gehenna Press 1952
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- ②④ **Walt Whitman** (for a Gehenna Press Broadside) 1955
- ②⑤ **Blake from a Life Mask by Deville** from 'Blake and the Youthful Ancients' Gehenna Press 1956
- ②⑥ **A page of three-wood engravings** from 'Blake and the Youthful Ancients' Gehenna Press 1956
 Left: Portrait of William Blake (from the Prospectus)
 Centre: Blake: an imagined Death Mask
 Right: Blake after a drawing by John Linnell
- ②⑦ **A page of five wood-engravings** from 'Blake and the Youthful Ancients' Gehenna Press 1956
 Top: Edward Calvert after a portrait by his third son
 Centre left: Edward Calvert
 Centre middle: Frederick Tatham from a little-known photograph
 Centre right: Francis Finch
 Bottom: Samuel Palmer after the watercolour by Walter
- ②⑧ **Portrait of Wilfred Owen** after a drawing by Ben Shahn 1956
- ②⑨ **A page of four wood-engravings** 1957
 Top: Three portraits of Ernst Barlach
 Bottom: Hart Crane
- ③① **Bird** 1957
- ③② **Crow** 1958
- ③③ **Love me, love my dog** 1958
- ③④ **Wood-engraving** from 'The Auguries of Innocence' by William Blake, Gehenna Press 1959

HOMAGE TO GEIE DEBS



Individual pulls of each of these blocks can be ordered.
 Prices upon application

Homage to Gene Debs woodcut / 1949



Angel of Death woodcut / 1959



Walt Whitman wood-engraving / 1955

Leonard Baskin was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1922: he is now 39 years old. He has taught sculpture and printmaking at Smith College, in Northampton, Massachusetts since 1953. His media are exclusively wood and bronze sculpture, woodcut and wood-engraving, and drawing. He does not paint. It is his impetus that led to the foundation of the Gehenna Press, a small private press in Northampton specializing in fine book production. The Press is imbued with Baskin's character - rabbinical, erudite, perfectionist, and somewhat archaistic. He has an especial admiration for William Blake, the Metaphysical Poets, Bresdin and Barlach. He is an artist who can be described as 'literary' in the sense that Ruskin would have approved of, and Roger Fry would not

Baskin's success has been outstanding; prizes, one-man exhibitions, accolades of all kinds, seem endless. In America, some regard him as undoubtedly the greatest artist working in the US, others see him as a purveyor of artless technical perfection, a charlatan and a poseur. I believe the former

RWHE



Robert Bly was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1925. He is now 50 years old. He has taught English and literature at North College in Burlington, Massachusetts since 1955. His writing has appeared in many magazines, journals, and books. He has also been a frequent speaker at literary conferences. He does not mind it is his opinion that in the foundation of his literary career a small private press in the United States is the best place to start. The Press is indeed with Bly's character - a character, creative, persistent, and somewhat stubborn. He has an especial admiration for William Blake, the English poet. Bly's work and thought, he is an artist who can be described as "Bly" in the sense that Bly's work has appeared in the pages of the press.

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1975

